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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 003161

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STATE FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARPI, AND NEA/PD
ALSO FOR IIP COORDINATOR ALEX FELDMAN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/17/2015
TAGS: PREL KISL KPAO PTER TC
SUBJECT: UAE IMAMS DENOUNCE TERROR, EXTREMISM

REF: A. STATE 131453

1B. STATE 121757

Classified By: AMBASSADOR MICHELE J. SISON, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: In response to the July 7 terror attacks in London and the continuing violence in Iraq, the UAE has stepped up its efforts to denounce terrorist violence. The UAE's latest push has included a public campaign with unequivocal condemnations of extremism in government-approved Friday sermons broadcast on national television and covered in the Arabic and English print media, which includes statements such as, "what do we gain by killing a Muslim like the Egyptian Ambassador in Iraq, an act deemed unlawful and forbidden by the Prophet Mohammed, or by kidnapping journalists, workers, truck drivers, and medical staff who are videotaped while slain like sheep? Is it ordained by Islam? Never." The UAE has been an outspoken critic of terrorism since well before 9/11, and the current crop of younger leaders who succeeded the late Sheikh Zayed has every intention of combating local extremism, whether it manifests itself in the schools, the mosques, or elsewhere. In a 16 July meeting, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed told us that the UAE would soon take the additional step of splitting the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs into two ministries, in order to guarantee that sufficient resources are devoted to ensuring that moderate Islam is preached and taught in UAE mosques and schools. An Action Request for IIP and NEA/PD is contained in para 12. End Summary.

Friday Sermon: "Warning Against Terrorism"

¶2. (C) On Friday, July 15, preachers in the UAE's 1,500 Sunni and Shi'a mosques were directed by the UAEG to read verbatim from a sermon approved by the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs condemning acts of terror. As is customary, the sermon was aired live nationwide on Abu Dhabi TV, but it was unusual to see excerpts of the sermon published in both the Arabic and English press the following day. At a July 16 meeting, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) told Ambassador and visiting DEA Administrator Karen Tandy that he had personally met with 10 senior imams before the Friday sermon in order to gain their support for this bold statement. MbZ said that the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs had monitored approximately 30 percent of the mosques across the country and that 90 percent of those preachers had delivered the pre-approved sermon condemning terrorism "verbatim." Although his office was still compiling reactions, MbZ had only heard of one negative response from an individual in the Emirate of Fujairah.

¶3. (C) MbZ said that the UAEG's campaign against extremist ideology would not stop with toughly worded sermons. He noted that the UAE would soon announce the split-up of the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs into two ministries. This move will allow Islamic Affairs Ministry officials to better focus on monitoring and guiding Islamic teachings in UAE schools and mosques. MbZ had told us earlier that the UAE is no longer encouraging Pakistani, Saudi or Egyptian professors of religion to come to the UAE, preferring instead to recruit moderate Moroccan and Tunisian scholars. According to MbZ, approximately 70 percent of the imams in the UAE are foreign, and only 30 percent are UAE citizens.

¶4. (U) Justice and Islamic Affairs Minister Al Dhaheri told Arabic daily "Al Khaleej" July 18 that the sermon, entitled "Warning Against Terrorism," was part of a "national strategy" to eliminate terrorism. The sermon stated that "Muslims are currently plagued with feeble-minded sects who, like Bin Laden, Al Zawahiri, and Al Zarqawi, lost their way and fell under the illusion that they are doing the right thing. Though inadequately enlightened (with the teachings of Islam), they sought absolute power, turning things upside down falsely in the name of Islam."

¶5. (U) The sermon raised several rhetorical questions. "So, how does it help Islam when civilians are slaughtered in Iraq, Afghanistan, New York, Madrid, Bali, Casablanca, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and lately in London, by a handful of criminal killers falsely belonging to Islam? What do we gain by killing a Muslim like the Egyptian Ambassador in Iraq, an act deemed unlawful and forbidden by the Prophet Mohammed, or by kidnapping journalists, workers, truck drivers, and medical staff who are videotaped while slain like sheep? Is it ordained by Islam? Never. ... The Prophet Mohammed spoke of a woman who would be punished in hell for having a cat locked up without food, or even for not freeing the cat so it could feed itself. So, how about killing peaceful, unarmed civilians the way they do on the TV today? So, we feel it is our duty to condemn criminal sinful acts of murder, of destroying civilization and property, of instilling fear in the name of Islam and the Muslim cause. What do they want Islam to be like when it is already known as a message of mercy, peace, and justice for all mankind? Is this the proper way to serve it and attain Muslim rights? Don't they realize what they have done by such treacherous acts? They turned the whole world against us until Islam and terror became, unjustly, synonymous. ... So, we say it loud and clear that he who kills the innocent is no Muslim. It is quite strange to hear these criminals justify their acts as 'jihad' and position themselves as judges and rulers. ... Every now and then we are taken by newcomers appointing themselves as emirs who find support among the illiterate. ... We condemn all acts of aggression and terror, practiced, unjustly, in the name of Islam against Muslims and non-Muslims. Islam, in fact, warned strongly against this sect, and the Prophet Mohammed said: 'It is unlawful for Muslims to kill or steal from one another. It is totally unfair for a Muslim to despise his Muslim brother. This means that every Muslim is accountable before God to observe

others' peace and to do his best to defend his Muslim brother."

¶ 6. (C) MbZ's director for international affairs, Yousef Al Otaiba, who had alerted the Ambassador the night before the sermon to the fact that the UAEG would publicly express its opposition to extremist-inspired terror, asked that Embassy take note of the sermon and public reaction to it. Al Otaiba also said that the government wanted to make clear that extremist ideology would not be accepted or condoned in the UAE. "People have to understand that the security of the UAE is the most important thing. It is even more important than religion," he said. Other government officials also appeared to be very proud of this measure and noted that they were "the only country" in the region to condemn publicly and swiftly the attacks in London. A number of our UAEG contacts emphasized that they wanted to ensure that the USG was aware of the contents of the sermon.

Sheikh Saif, Sheikh Tahnoun on Moderate Islam

¶ 7. (C) During a July 9 meeting, Abu Dhabi Ruler's Representative for the Eastern Region and elder Al Nahyan ruling family member Sheikh Tahnoun bin Mohammed Al Nahyan, told the Ambassador of the UAEG's determination to stamp out extremism. Clerics and teachers needed to be counseled, regardless of their nationality, he said. (After 9/11, Tahnoun played a role in the retirement of some UAE University scholars with pay and the UAEG's decision to order other persons to stop teaching and preaching due to their extremist views. Some Pakistani imams were deported.)

¶ 8. (C) The Ambassador also used a July 16 meeting with Interior Minister Sheikh Saif bin Zayed, a member of Abu Dhabi's Al Nahyan ruling family and the federal Cabinet, to praise the sermon. Sheikh Saif said that the UAEG has been very focused on the issue of terrorism for some time. He recalled that the late President (his father, Sheikh Zayed) had gathered Muslim scholars during the month of Ramadan and urged them to preach about moderation. After 9/11, Sheikh Zayed told Muslim scholars that what had happened in the U.S. was the killing of innocents. He asked rhetorically, "What would you call these men? Muslims or criminals?" Sheikh Saif added, "If someone killed your wife or child, and if I gave that person refuge, what does that say about me?" The UAEG's decision to authorize a sermon condemning terrorism and violence in the name of religion stems from its belief that a government has the responsibility to criticize what is wrong and provide guidance to the public, Sheikh Saif said. Sheikh Zayed would have been pleased with this sermon, he added. The July 15 sermon echoed what was said at the October 2004 international conference on Islam sponsored by the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs in Abu Dhabi, when clerics from the UAE and other nations exhorted preachers to adhere to sermons with moderate themes. The UAEG expected that the themes of moderation and reform of Islamic studies curriculum would be recurring themes in future Ramadan conferences, Saif noted.

¶ 9. (C) Comment: The split-up of the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs into two distinct ministries is significant in that it would allow a newly constituted Ministry of Islamic Affairs to devote more attention to the training of moderate-thinking imams, and the crafting and monitoring of sermons with a moderate political and social tone. Dr. Mohammed Sulaiman, the Ministry's senior religious scholar, told "Al Ittihad" newspaper July 16 that Islam is a religion of moderation, love, and peace, adding that any Muslim who has been taught correctly will not commit any of these terrorist crimes. The split-up of the Ministry would also allow greater focus on the implementation of reform of the Islamic Studies curriculum in the secondary schools within the next two years. The Ministry of Education implemented a new Islamic Studies syllabus at the primary school level in 2005 with input from the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs. (Septel to comment on possible impact of this split on our draft Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty and other

judicial cooperation matters.) End Comment.

¶10. (C) Action request for IIP and NEA/PD: We would appreciate inclusion of the July 15 sermon quotations in IIP's Infocentral "Quotes from moderate Islam" section.
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